



## ARTICLE

# Regional security in Asia: Japan's strategy for stability and the role of Europe

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**Abstract** In Asia the rise of both China and India is becoming a reality. Their growth is of an unprecedented scale. While the US continues to be the only superpower, it needs the help of like-minded countries to deal with international challenges. Beyond 2030, the G3—the US, China and India as the pillars of a tri-polar world—may become a reality. In order to cope with changes of this magnitude, increased cooperation between the US, Europe and democracies in Asia is essential. To be successful in adopting this new strategic landscape, it is necessary to strengthen the ties between Europe and democracies in Asia. In this regard, rule-making is the key area for success. Japan is contributing to these efforts by applying a comprehensive engagement policy towards China while strengthening its alliance with the US. Establishing strategic ties with India is also important. Japan and Europe can do much to help achieve stability. After all, Japan needs a strong and engaging Europe, just as Europe needs a strong and active Japan.

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The views expressed in this article are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Japan.

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## Introduction

This article describes the basic framework for a survival strategy for Japan for the coming 15–20 years. I will first show how Japan analyses major regional and global trends. Then I will outline a description of a basic global framework that is capable of coping with these major trends. Following this, I will clarify Japan's fundamental choices in response to these trends. Finally, I will argue that Europe is relevant to our common endeavour to deal with these major changes. I will approach this by exploring the potential areas of cooperation between Japan and Europe.

## What is happening?

What is predicted for the future basically dictates how one formulates what should be done to prepare for it. There are many factors that should be taken into consideration in predicting the future, but they are too numerous to be described in full in this paper. Thus, I will focus on the most crucial ones.

## The unprecedented magnitude of the rising powers

In the past, we have seen the impact of rising powers on international affairs. But what we are witnessing currently is quite different from the past in terms of scale. In short, both China and India are rising powers. This means that 2.5 billion people, or one-third of the world's population, live in countries that are growing in power. This inevitably needs to be reflected by adjustments to the world order. In order for long-term peaceful and prosperous coexistence with these huge rising powers, the so-called status quo powers should adjust the existing global frameworks or rules by taking into consideration their perspectives.

However, at the same time, there should be some basic rules which should not be changed. For example, a state should not unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion. It sounds obvious, but sometimes this rule is ignored. The above-mentioned 'adjustment' act should be coupled with efforts to establish a consensus on what the fundamental rules for all are.

## Bipolar, multipolar or not polar at all?

I belong to the school of thought that believes that the US will remain the only superpower, if it is one today, until at least 2030 (see below). This is not only because the

GDP of the US is still almost twice as large as China's and its defence spending about three times larger, but also because the US is one of the few developed countries where the population is projected to continue to grow. The present population of the US, about 300 million, is predicted to become 400 million around 2040, and this will keep the American frontier spirit going. However, the relative supremacy of the US is destined to decline. At the same time, there are a variety of challenges which the US, even at its mightiest, cannot solve by itself. These include terrorism, climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and so on. The US is still a necessary part of the solution but it is no longer a sufficient part of it. This means that the US needs support, particularly from its allies and like-minded countries.

## Does beyond 2030 mean the G3?

Last but not least, let me extend the range of projection to cover possible developments beyond 2030. The year 2030 will be an interesting one. It is foreseen that around that year, several symbolic events are likely to happen. First, China's GDP may become larger than that of the US. This does not mean that the Chinese people will become as wealthy as Americans, but it will have a huge symbolic impact. Second, the defence budget of China may reach similar levels to that of the US. Again, this does not mean that the Chinese military will be as capable as that of the US, but it will be seen as another symbolic factor. Third, in 2030, India is projected to have the world's largest population, about 1.5 billion, surpassing that of China, while the decline of the Chinese population will slowly begin. The concept of the G2, consisting of the US and China, has often been discussed. But if the above projection is correct, by the time China becomes strong enough to squarely face the US, India will have joined the superpower club. In other words, there may not be a G2 but there will certainly be a G3 (the US, China and India), and our long-term planning should take this probability into consideration.

## Dealing with a new world order

These trends will inevitably bring about dramatic changes in the global power balance in due course. So, the next question is how can we cope with these trends without causing dramatic disorder?

The reality is that if you look around, there are only three poles in the world which are both capable of working to achieve global stability and willing to do so. They are the US, Europe and the democracies in Asia, including Japan, Australia and the Republic of Korea, among others. The key to stability is to establish the closest possible coordination and cooperation among these three poles.

In this regard, the US and Europe have created NATO, while the US and Asian democracies have created a series of bilateral alliances. This means that the weakest link in this cooperation is between Europe and the democracies in Asia. If we succeed

in realising closer coordination and cooperation between the two, it will represent a net plus in terms of the capability to create a more stable world.

In more concrete terms, the most important and indispensable issue is rule-making. Even though interests and political systems differ from one country to another, it is essential to have common rules in order to establish a peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence. Rules equal more predictability and transparency. We should be able to adjust the existing rules by taking into consideration the perspectives of the rising powers. If this is not done, it may result in there being constant tension between us and them. However, at the same time, there are a few key factors that need to be borne in mind.

First, we need to distinguish what should not be changed from what can be adjusted. In this regard, why do Crimea and Ukraine matter to Japan? Why is Japan party to the international sanctions regime? It is because this incident touches on one of the fundamental rules that should be globally respected: that the status quo should not be changed unilaterally by force or coercion. This should not only be the case in Europe but in Asia too. Another fundamental rule is *pacta sunt servanda*, meaning that states must abide by what is agreed. If a state agrees and ratifies international agreements, it must honour them. A state cannot just ignore treaties and the procedures therein that have been agreed to. If rules as fundamental as the above examples are not secured, we cannot effectively assure stability.

Second, when adjusting the existing rules or creating new ones, like-minded countries should reach a consensus on minimum standards. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is one of the latest examples of rule-making. The competition of new ideas is in itself a good and healthy thing. What is important is whether the rules applied to the new ideas meet basic global standards. In the case of the AIIB, the rules relate to environmental protection, the avoidance of corruption and so on. The problem was that there was no coordination of consensus building over these standards among the status quo powers before some of the European countries announced their participation. It is not yet clear, even now that a basic agreement has been reached among the founding members, whether global standards will be secured in practice. The AIIB is only the beginning; there will certainly be more new ideas to come. We have learned a lot of lessons this time, and we are determined to do a better job in the future.

Lastly, in rule-making, who takes the lead and in what kind of international framework is of crucial importance. There can be many different approaches depending on the situation but, when it comes to regional rule-making, the East Asia Summit (EAS) seems to be the best platform among the existing regional institutions. This is simply because it involves almost all the important regional players: the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India, plus the US and Russia. Japan is open to discussing any issues, whether they be security-related or economic, within the EAS. For example, in relation to the ongoing challenges in the South China Sea, including territorial disputes, unlawful reclamation and unilateral militarisation, the EAS is a good platform

to talk about not only confidence-building measures but also practical arrangements to ensure mishaps are avoided, such as fishery agreements and crisis management mechanisms. Because the US, India and China—the potential parties of the G3—are all members of the EAS, it is the perfect platform for future regional economic integration. Japan will continue to make every effort to make the EAS more relevant and useful.

## What should Japan do?

What should Japan's basic policy choice be? And what should Japan do to achieve its policy goals? In this section I argue that, based upon the above assessment, the fundamental choices that Japan has made will remain valid until around 2030.

### Basic strategic choices

There are only a few things that cannot be changed and a country's geographical position is one of them. Japan is destined to live as a neighbour of China. Historically, China has been much bigger, more advanced and more prosperous than Japan. Our basic task has been and will continue to be to establish a peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence with China while maintaining our independence and, to put it casually, without being told what to do.

In the post-Second World War environment, Japan made two fundamental choices: to form an alliance with the US and to coexist peacefully and prosperously with China through the application of a comprehensive engagement policy. As assumed above, if the US continues to remain the only superpower until around 2030, Japan's two fundamental choices will remain valid until around 2030 as well.

However, it is also true, as pointed out above, that the relative supremacy of the US is in decline and there are also many challenges that the US cannot solve by itself. Therefore, it makes sense for the allies of the US to do more to maintain the effectiveness of their alliances. One of the major elements in that regard is to establish closer strategic ties with India, which is predicted to become one of the G3 at some point after 2030.

### Comprehensive engagement with China

Japan's clear policy objective is a peaceful and prosperous coexistence with China. It is inevitable that there will be some issues and challenges between big neighbours, but these can be managed with wisdom from both sides, as has been the case for the past few thousand years. It is always wise to have a crisis management mechanism in place as well, and there are plenty of efforts being made to that end between the two.

In fact, Japan and China have many interests in common, including economic exchange. China has been Japan's number one trading partner since 2007. The environment is another interest shared by China and Japan. Whatever happens in China's environment will have impact on Japan, and Japan has every incentive to cooperate with China in tackling regional environmental challenges.

On matters of energy security and the safety and freedom of navigation we also share common interests. Japan and China are both major energy consumers and definitely favour value for money. We share the same sea lines of communication (SLOC) from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca into the South and East China Sea. Nobody appreciates heightened tension in these SLOC. This is true not only for Japan but also for others using the same SLOC, including European countries and China.

It also makes sense that whenever China is ready to become part of the solution to challenges of a global scale, we should welcome it. The latest good example is China's increasing involvement in peacekeeping operations in Africa. In South Sudan, 350 peacekeepers from the Japanese Self Defence Force are working side by side with 700 peacekeepers from the Chinese infantry division. Europeans know very well that there is an increasing number of 'fragile states' in Africa and unless something is done to change their fate, they will become an even more significant source of refugees and extremism. The earlier the engagement, the better, and Europe should be prepared to use whatever help exists and is useful.

## Alliance with the US

Beyond all that has been said thus far, it is always wise to be prepared for the worst case scenario. A comprehensive engagement policy should include policies for protecting Japan under the worst possible circumstances. Here the alliance with the US is essential. History shows that the better you are prepared for crises, the less chance there is of crises happening. Obviously, the Japan–US alliance is not only in place for the defence of Japan but also to ensure the stability of the entire region and to face such challenges as those that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea poses. It makes sense to strengthen the capability of the alliance with the US.

Japan and the US have continuously improved the interoperability and the level of readiness of their alliance. Supporting the smooth forward deployment of US forces is another priority. Since US forward deployment is increasingly rotational in nature, not only in Asia but also throughout the Indian Ocean, Europe and Africa, this involves making the effort to network among like-minded countries en route.

It is symbolic that the notion of 'hub and spokes' which used to be used to describe the security framework in Asia is no longer relevant and that 'networking' is the latest concept. Rather than having the US–Japan and the US–Australia alliance operating side by side, we should establish a network (or trilateral security cooperation) between the US, Japan and Australia, by promoting security cooperation between the allies of

the US. Such cooperation used to be non-existent, but the growing level and scale of interoperability was demonstrated after the Great East Japan Earthquake, when not only the US but also the Australian armed forces played a major role in supporting disaster-hit areas. We would very much like to further strengthen the Japan–US–Republic of Korea network as well.

Last but not least, Japan has made a reasonable effort to improve its capabilities. The establishment of a National Security Council together with a National Security Strategy has made it possible for not only faster and more effective but also more transparent and predictable decisions to be made. The recent enactment of the new legislation for peace and security is another example of the efforts being made.

## **Establish strategic ties with India**

For Japan, it makes sense, in more than one way, to establish strategic ties with India. India shares the same values as Japan. India is situated very strategically in the middle of the SLOC which Japan uses and it plays a key role in maintaining the security and freedom of navigation throughout the Indian Ocean. India is a growing market where there are a lot of opportunities for mutually beneficial economic interaction.

Many efforts have been made to promote bilateral relations. To strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries through frequent coordination at the top, Prime Minister Abe travelled to India in January 2014. This was followed by a visit from Prime Minister Modi to Japan in August 2014. Abe visited India again in December 2015. They also meet at multilateral meetings such as the EAS or G20. They are very close.

There is also another win–win example of networking here. The Japan–US–India trilateral mechanism is well-established. Through it, issues of mutual interest are discussed, including maritime security, terrorism and the global economy. The navies of the three countries have already carried out joint exercises twice. This trilateral mechanism will increasingly continue to promote the strategic partnership.

## **What can Japan and Europe do together?**

Finally, what can Japan and Europe do together? As mentioned above, Japan and Europe are two of the three poles which are both capable of and willing to work for global stability, and the closer our coordination and cooperation are, the better the chances of success. Below, I will touch upon some examples of ways in which we can interact.

## Share visions for common security challenges

Sometimes, a flat map can be deceptive. Asia is closer than it feels to Europe, even in a geographic sense. In fact, all major European capitals are closer to Asia than Washington, DC or New York. North Korean missiles that can reach the continental US can also reach Europe. Needless to say, Russia not only has a European border but also an Asian one. Europeans use the same SLOC for trade as their Asian counterparts. In short, our destinies are intertwined.

Therefore, we need to have a more enhanced exchange of views about incidents that happen not only in Europe or the Middle East but also in Asia. We would also like to hear more from Europe about its views on critical issues in Asia, such as what is happening in the South China Sea. It would be great to clearly hear European perspectives, for example when the outcome of the arbitration case between the Philippines and China is released. After all, this relates to the rule of law, which has global implications.

## Act jointly to promote common security interests

Our cooperation can make a difference in many areas where common security interests are involved. These include the fight against terrorism, anti-piracy operations, coordinating endeavours to protect and promote the use of cyberspace, and so on. One of the areas of particular importance currently is maritime security. To keep our common SLOC safe and free, there may be a rationale for joint exercises at a mid-point between Asia and Europe, such as in the Indian Ocean, to prepare for potential future joint operations. A practical way to move forward would be for some European countries to join the Japan–US–India naval exercises mentioned above.

## Realise the indirect links between our interests and help each other

The example I have in mind here is to help improve the situation in the fragile states in Africa mentioned above. Japan is ready to help where we can make a difference. Our participation in South Sudan is an example of this. Because this issue has the potential to become more critical in the near future, Europe should enhance its engagement and be willing to use all available help, including any offered by China.

## Conclusion

In short, my conclusion is that Japan needs a strong and engaged Europe; I believe that Europe needs a strong and active Japan as well. There are many areas where we can



cooperate to make sure that this will continue to be the case—such cooperation is desperately needed at this time.

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